

Note: The jail where Roychowdhury is housed permits only flexible safety pencils, which produce very light writing and the letter could not be legibly scanned. Roychowdhury's handwritten letter was transcribed and typed as well as possible, preserving any typos.

Hon. Judge Conley,

Between drafts scribbled on paper, composed in both waking thoughts and slumbering dreams, this may indeed be the 100th iteration of this letter. Through these myriad versions, I have been able to reflect on all of my actions and motivations that lead me to commit such a dangerous crime as arson – This letter is meant not only to offer you a personal portrayal of myself but also to offer a sincere explanation of, and an apology for, my crime to Wisconsin Family Action, to my dear family, to my friends, and to my community.

Firstly, I apologize to Wisconsin Family Action from the bottom of my heart. While I will always believe in and fight for all of our civil liberties, including abortion access and medical autonomy more generally, using tactics of fear and violence such as I have was totally unacceptable. The period of time around when the Dobbs decision leaked was one where I found myself feeling lost and unmoored. Finishing my Ph.D. and then entering the corporate sector as a scientist at Promega left me with significantly fewer social ties and questioning my purpose and direction in life. Most days, I found myself alone at the bar after work. Sitting there drunkenly reading increasingly ominous and disconcerting news left me wallowing in a sense of anger, dread, and impotence. These combined factors lead me to commit an act fundamentally antithetical to my deeply held ethics of building a world based in compassion, care, and equity.

I offer the context of my mentality at the time not to exculpate myself or sanitize my actions, but because understanding the root causes of an action is a necessary step in preventing its reoccurrence. I am, at my core, motivated to better the world by advocating for the oppressed and marginalized, and against coercion and oppression. Not only does arson endanger peoples lives and wellbeing, it does nothing to build the peaceful and just world I want to see.

I justified my desire to make a dramatic statement by creating a false delineation between the physical structure of an institution and the people involved in the institution.

Despite doing my utmost to reduce the risk of hurting anyone, like choosing a time the building would be uninhabited and checking that there were no cars in the parking lot, there's no way to ensure a fire won't hurt someone. I wanted to start a small fire as an act of protest that I expected could be easily extinguished. My own panic and

incompetence thankfully ensured that one Molotov did not break, the second simply spilled, and the remaining two remained unused.

Regardless of so-called precautions, intentions of safety, and ineptitude, I committed an act of violence and the weight of such actions came immediately to bear. In the following moments and days I felt ashamed, afraid, and guilty. The foolishness of my actions was further compounded by “Jane’s Revenge” assuming credit. To be clear: I have no association or knowledge of “Jane’s Revenge” and I oppose the militant rhetoric that they have employed. And there certainly was no grand national conspiracy behind my actions. I did not expect ill-conceived crime of anger to spiral out of control, but then, fires are known to do just that.

In addition to emphasizing my complete ignorance of and lack of connection to Jane’s Revenge, I think it is important that I address and contextualize two things in the PSR: the molotov cocktails in my garage and potassium nitrate.

The two molotovs were let over from the crime I committed. As I was starting the fire and panic set in, I left without using my remaining two molotovs. I intended to then a) dispose of the gasoline in an environmentally conscious manner, and/or b) use the gasoline as an organic solvent to clean and degrease parts for my two broken-down motorcycles. True to form, I procrastinated and did neither and they languished in the garage, forgotten.

The potassium nitrate that was being discussed in the conversation with a friend was intended to be used in making colorful smoking fireworks, the ones readily available at firework stores. We intended to use them in peaceful demonstrations in 2020, but they too are potentially dangerous and the idea never came to fruition. I think as scientists it is difficult to resist small DIY projects like that sometimes. I have no intention of even considering such things again.

The guilt, shame, and fear I felt in the immediate aftermath of my crime catalyzed a reevaluation in how I wanted to exist in the world. My mission in life is to fight oppression and make people’s lives better in real and tangible ways. Clearly setting things on fire was not the best way for me to do that – that was immediately apparent.

I want to create a world based in love and care for each other such that we may live harmoniously. To do so requires that we first address the fundamentals, meaning taking special care to feed and house each other. Using my labor to engineer Split Halo Tag Technologies at Promega did not seem the most effective way to build resilient communities in the face of an increasingly precarious world. Eventually, I summoned the courage to quit my job as a researcher and instead travel to learn how others were structuring their own communities. My first step was to be San Lucas Toliman, where

my wonderful partner Taryn works, and from there I had loose plans to see how the famously egalitarian Basque communities in Spain were doing.

Naturally, it was at this time the consequences of my actions caught up with me at the Boston Airport.

Jail is perhaps less idyllic than the temperate rainforest of Guatemala or pastures of the Pyrenees, but I think there are actually very few better places for me to learn how to further be of service to those around me. Jails and prisons are incredibly challenging environments, and all the social ills that we observe on the outside (like racism, sexism, violence, and toxic hyper-masculinity, among others) are magnified ten-fold in here. Such maladaptive and antisocial behavior is difficult to address under the best of circumstances, let alone in the psychological pressure cooker that is the prison yard. Prisoners have little opportunity to unlearn prejudice and break cycles of violence and learned helplessness in here, especially as they spend much of their young and formative years incarcerated.

I have learned to better myself through the sheer dumb luck of having been born into loving and kind family, with adequate resources, and with the help of phenomenal friends and community. Most in here haven't had even 1/10th of the providence I have had. When and how can anyone in here unlearn toxic behaviors when their whole lives have been a struggle for survival? A struggle that continues while incarcerated?

I've spent a lot of time in here reading and journaling so I can better understand the world and myself. I've been regaining literacy in my mother tongue, Bengali. I have folded hundreds of paper cranes and done tens of thousands of pushups. But the most impactful thing I've done is learn to draw a portrait. Only through drawing portraits in here have I been able to open people up to change.

When I've sat with inmates to draw their faces, they've opened up to me in ways I never could have predicted. In trusting me with their likeness, they also trust me with their stories. I try to draw them with as much dignity as I can, because so much dignity is stripped away in here. I think when the people I draw are made to feel dignified, they are able to show their many traumas with some dignity too.

Change requires healing, and healing requires self-reflection and addressing one's history and trauma. By drawing portraits, I feel like I've been able to create a space for self-reflection and self-actualization with such a simple act as listening and doodlings, I've been able to share so many meaningful conversations and literally watch people grow and change for the better. I feel deeply honored to bear witness to such changes toward a better and kinder life.

I intend to continue trying to create safe spaces for healing, growth, and learning while in prison. Hopefully I can be a positive influence on people while doing so. Change is something that comes of the loving relationships we form with others, not acts of destruction or glib graffiti.

My intention is to translate relational connectivity and resilience building learned inside to my life outside when I am able to return to my own family and community. I hope to share what I've learned with others by writing an academically rigorous auto-ethnography, highlighting and uplifting incarcerated voices. I also hope to build a community kitchen where people can gather and break bread. The only way we'll be able to meaningfully survive as a species is by rediscovering the resilience of a strongly connected and caring community, and I hope to play a role in building up my own.

What I look forward to the most upon completing my sentence is hopefully starting a family. Taryn and I had intended to start trying this year, but I'm hoping we're still able to on the other side of this next journey. The irony that committing such a violent crime as a statement for reproductive autonomy would so drastically affect my own reproductive autonomy is not lost on me – perhaps a fitting punishment of itself.

Regardless of where I am in the world, in prison or not, my life will continue to be devoted to the creation of a just, loving, and harmonious world. I will continue to advocate for the marginalized and for the earth and molotov cocktails will never again be a part of that process. Violence begets violence and serves no one.

I am a flawed and imperfect person, but my values mean everything to me and I intend to live a life as closely aligned with those values as possible. Acts of wanton destruction and violence carried out in anger have no place in my values or in any of my future actions.

I sincerely apologize to WFA, for the harm and damage I caused. I sincerely apologize to my family, friends, and loved ones for having put them through so much over this last year. I will work to build the world I want to live in through acts of compassion rooted in love and grace, and not through violence and anger.

With sincerity and respect,
Hrdindu S. Roychowdhury